School Readiness Funding

Frequently Asked Questions for early childhood   
education and care service providers

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# Purpose of this document

The School Readiness Funding (SRF) Frequently Asked Questions (the FAQ) is a publicly available document developed to support the Early Childhood Education and Care sector, allied health, menu providers and other stakeholders involved with SRF. The FAQ is a resource that provides an overview of the intent, policies and operational components of the SRF initiative to inform the sector and support effective implementation.

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) has made available a range of other resources to support the implementation of SRF including:

* SRF Annual Planning Guide
* Planning worksheets
* Online planning system in the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS)
* Quick Reference Guides
* Data literacy tip sheets and resources

Services should ensure that the FAQ is used in conjunction with the above resources to gain a complete understanding of the SRF initiative.

# School Readiness Funding Overview

SRF is a permanent and ongoing part of the Victorian kindergarten funding model.

The funding specifically aims to address the impacts of educational disadvantage experienced by some children, to ensure that all children attending a funded kindergarten program get the most out of their early learning.

It funds a range of programs and supports that aim to build the capacity of services, educators and families to support children's learning and development.

The amount of SRF each service receives is based on the level of need of the children enrolled at their service. This is informed by parental occupation and education data (also known as Student Family Occupation and Education data) as this is considered an accurate predictor of educational disadvantage.

All Victorian services with a funded kindergarten program are eligible to receive at least $1,000 in SRF. The funding can be used to purchase items from the Menu of Evidence Informed Programs and Supports (the Menu) and depending on the amount of funding a service receives; it may also enable access to Allied Health support pre-purchased and arranged by the Department

Items on the Menu are Department approved programs and supports that improve outcomes for children in three SRF priority areas:

communication (language development)

wellbeing (social and emotional)

access and inclusion.

SRF forms part of a service provider’s overall service agreement and must not be used on existing activities that are already in place through per capita funding. For more information, please refer to the SRF terms and conditions letter.

Early Childhood Improvement Branches (ECIBs) have been established across each of the Department’s 17 Areas to provide a model of place-based service delivery. ECIBs focus on building the capacity of Victoria’s early childhood sector to deliver high quality early childhood education to Victorian children.

ECIBs are responsible for working with the sector on all Department-funded kindergarten programs, including Early Start Kindergarten, Best Start, Pre-school Field Officers, Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) and more. ECIBs support service providers and services to plan and implement SRF to ensure it delivers the greatest possible impact for children and families. Refer to section 6 for more information about working with ECIBs.

# Key SRF Facts

### SRF Allocations – Process and responsibilities

Service providers will receive a letter from the Department advising of their funding allocation for the following year and outlining the terms and conditions of the funding.

Terms and conditions must be accepted within 14 days in KIMS. SRF is paid to the service provider, and the service provider is responsible for ensuring that all the terms and conditions of the funding are met.

Services receiving over $5,000 in SRF will also receive an allocation of Department procured allied health support: speech pathology, occupational therapy and child psychology (or social work if deemed appropriate).

The allied health support is distributed according to a tiered model. The sessions of support each service receives is based on a service’s total SRF allocation.

Service providers will receive their relevant allied health provider contact details from the local ECIB and are responsible for contacting the allied health provider to discuss how their allocated sessions will best be implemented. The Department-contracted allied health provider will then contact services to arrange delivery of allied health sessions.

### Planning for SRF

Once service providers receive their SRF and allied health allocations they can commence formal planning for the following year.

An SRF plan must be completed and submitted for each service receiving SRF within KIMS to the local ECIB for approval.

During this phase service providers are required to collect and analyze data and develop goals that reflect the needs of the cohort of the children, staff and families at the service. This analysis must inform the selection of SRF menu items, use of allied health support and other components of the SRF annual plan.

The Department provides a range of supports to assist services with plan development. Please contact the local ECIB to find out more information about these supports.

The person that develops and documents the SRF plan may be the early childhood teacher, educator, center director, supervisor or for larger providers, a dedicated administrative officer. Regardless of who is completing the plan, it must reflect the goals and needs of the individual service.

Services should contact menu providers as appropriate to fully understand the programs or services being provided, their suitability to meet the services needs and accurately estimate the costs of accessing menu items prior to including them in their SRF plan.

Service providers are required to endorse the SRF annual plans before they are submitted to the local ECIB for approval.

### Implementation of SRF

Once an SRF plan is approved, service providers can commence implementation with menu providers in the plan.

Services should make direct contact with menu providers to access program and supports according to the SRF plan. This may require negotiation with the menu provider regarding dates, times and locations.

The Department is not directly involved in this process once the plan is approved, however if services require support with engaging with menu providers the local ECIB can assist.

Services may experience situations where items from the SRF plan cannot be implemented as intended for a range of reasons. In these situations, it is important to contact the local ECIB to discuss any challenges or issues.

### Mid-year Review

Services are asked to complete a mid-year review survey in each cycle. This process provides a mid-cycle opportunity for services to reflect on how the implementation of the SRF plan is going, to make any changes required due to unexpected circumstances, and to assess and communicate the likelihood of an underspend.

* The mid-year review also enables the Department to pre-empt any risks of significant underspend and put measures in place to support services to pivot and reduce that risk.
* This process must be completed for every service, and the service provider is responsible for endorsing the mid-year review survey before submitting to the local ECIB.

### End of Year Acquittal

Services are required to acquit the SRF allocation each year. This provides the Department with oversight of SRF expenditure in line with the funding intent to ensure services have accessed and received appropriate supports during the year.

Service providers are best placed to nominate who should complete the end of year acquittal for each service, and this may be more than one person. This may be completed by a business manager, centre director, early childhood teacher or a combination of staff.

* This process must be completed for every service, and the service provider is responsible for endorsing the end-of-year acquittal before submitting to the Department.

# Key Dates

The dates below will support services to anticipate key milestones in the annual SRF funding cycle.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Timeline | Milestone |
| August - September | Planning workshops with services delivered by the Early Childhood Improvement Branches commence |
| September - October | New allied health providers contracted and announced (if applicable)  New menu items announced  Services are advised of their SRF allocations for the following year  Services are sent terms and conditions letters to review and accept |
| October - November | Services submit their SRF plans to their Early Childhood Improvement Branches through KIMS for approval |
| November - December | Services submit an acquittal of their previous year’s SRF funding by the end of third week in December  The second funding round, the ‘December sweep’, commences |
| January | Department reviews and approves SRF Plans and Acquittals in KIMS |
| February - March | The Department makes the first of two SRF payments to services  Services start implementing SRF plans |
| April | Services are required to submit Student Family Occupation Education Data as part of the Annual Confirmation process  The third and final funding round commences (the ‘April Sweep’) |
| June - July | Services are required to complete the Mid-Year Review in KIMS  The Department makes the second SRF payment to services |

# Frequently Asked Questions - Planning

## a. Student Family Occupation and Education (SFOE) Data

### Do service providers need to collect data from parents?

Yes. Service providers are required to collect occupation and education data from parents and/or carers of each eligible child (all children enrolled in the funded kindergarten program are eligible).

Service providers are required to enter this information into KIMS against each child’s record as part of the Annual Confirmation process. Service providers must collect data from at least 70 per cent of all parents and/or carers to receive an SRF allocation.

An SRF parent flyer is available online [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderim.aspx) to assist services with communicating to parents and/ or carers why this data is being collected. Additional help in drafting newsletters or online copies for parents is available on request. To request this, please contact the local ECIB.

### Why is the Department using SFOE as a measure of educational disadvantage?

SFOE is an effective measure of educational disadvantage, and is the same measure used to distribute equity funding in schools. It is a better predictor of a child’s future educational outcomes than other measures, such as household income.

### What if services suspect that the SFOE data collection form has not been completed correctly?

It is important that services collect the most accurate information available, however it is not an expectation that services are required to verify the information that is provided to them.

If services have concerns that correct information has not been provided, or if the data provided is incomplete, this should be raised with families and/or carers.

Please note that where a child’s SFOE completion states ‘parent did not respond’ this equates to non-completion of data and it cannot contribute to the service level data completion rate (minimum required to receive funding is 70 per cent).

### Where can I access a copy of a template SFOE data collection form?

The updated form is available on the Department’s website [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderim.aspx): (titled: Parental occupation coding details form.docx).

### What if a service provides insufficient SFOE data?

Service providers are required to collect enrolment data, including SFOE data, as a condition of their service agreement. Service providers must collect data from at least 70 per cent of all parents and/or carers to receive an SRF allocation.

Where service providers do not provide sufficient SFOE data they may experience greater funding variability year-to-year or inaccuracy in their funding amounts, or they may not receive an SRF allocation at all.

## b. SRF Planning

### What is the SRF Annual Plan and how do service providers develop one?

All service providers must submit an SRF Plan for each of their services through KIMS to receive SRF payments in the following year. The SRF plan allows the service provider to record how it intends to spend the funding for the following year. When developing the SRF Plan, service providers must consider the needs of the children and communities they operate in and the capability of educators to meet those needs.

The SRF plan should clearly explain how improving the service’s skills and capacity can support these needs and facilitate positive change. Goals should be developed from the perspective of the educators/teachers, families and children against each of the priority areas.

The SRF Annual Planning Guide, which provides services with detailed guidance on the development of SRF annual plans, including data collection and goal setting, can be found [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/funding/school-readiness-funding-annual-planning-guide.pdf).

If the SRF Plan does not demonstrate sufficient consideration of how the service intends to spend their funding to build capability and improve children’s outcomes, service providers will be required to work with their local ECIB to revise and improve their plan before they can receive their funding. All service providers receiving SRF are required to submit a SRF Plan for each of their services for approval to the Department.

Services receiving up to $5,000 of SRF are encouraged to use online resources and planning materials to independently complete their own SRF Plan. A service provider’s local ECIB can be contacted for any questions or guidance.

It is advised that all services look to their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and that any proposed SRF menu items selected align with their QIP key improvement actions where appropriate.

### With Three-Year-Old Kindergarten rolling out state-wide in 2022, do I need to create SRF plans for both three and four-year-old kindergarten programs?

No.

Services are only required to develop one SRF plan each, even where multiple programs are delivered at the same service. SRF plans should cover all kindergarten programs and all educators/teachers.

It will be important that service providers gather the necessary data across any funded kindergarten program cohorts to understand how SRF can best address the educational disadvantage across the service.

### What is the SRF Menu?

The SRF Menu offers a range of items that have been externally validated for their effectiveness in building the capability of educators and families to enhance children’s learning and development. The Menu is updated every year.

When choosing a menu item, service providers should consider what the data is saying about the needs of the children, educators and families at the service and which menu items will help address these needs and the goals developed for the service.

In addition to this, services should outline how the menu item will assist in achieving the service’s overarching goal/s. Services are required to spend most of their SRF on items from the Menu, and those services receiving $5,000 or less must spend all their SRF allocation on items from the Menu.

There are more than 155 programs and supports offered on the Menu, which is updated annually. The Menu is available [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/SRFmenu_tiles.aspx) and includes programs and supports such as:

* Department centrally contracted allied health (speech therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists) – for those services receiving over $5,000 in SRF
* independently sourced allied health (speech therapists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists)
* educators, coaching and backfill
* programs and services that support trauma-informed practice, secure attachment and mental health
* programs and services that target communication, language and literacy
* programs to support social and emotional wellbeing
* support for cultural and linguistically diverse children and families
* parenting support
* access and inclusion programs.

### How should I choose which SRF supports and programs to access?

When selecting SRF supports and programs to access, service providers must consider the needs of the children and communities they operate in and the capability of educators to meet those needs.

Services should consider this context and identify priorities and menu items that are most likely to deliver their desired outcomes, informed by:

* alignment to the service’s priorities and identified needs
* evidence of the menu item’s effectiveness to address their identified needs
* accessibility in the area
* cost of programs and supports.

Service providers should work with their service staff to determine who is best placed to select menu items that build educator capability and improve outcomes for the children attending their services.

Service providers can also contact their local ECIB to support selection of menu items that will strengthen the capability of educators to best meet the needs of children and the local community.

### How do services set the 2022 SRF goals during the planning stage?

Goals will be set under each of the three SRF priority areas. Services engage in data collection and analysis to inform preferred priority area/s and associated goals (noting there can be multiple goals for a priority area). Services should refer to the [SRF Annual Planning Guide](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/funding/school-readiness-funding-annual-planning-guide.pdf) to better understand working with data and setting of SMART goals. Further guidance can be accessed by contacting the local ECIB.

There is also a requirement to set goals for services who receive pre-purchased allied health, however these goals can be further refined after planning in partnership with the relevant allied health provider.

### When should a service provider contact a menu provider?

Service providers work directly with menu providers to organise access to programs and supports.

Service providers are encouraged to make initial contact with menu providers leading up to and during the planning process to find out how menu items could align to the goals and needs of the service and signal interest in menu items for the menu provider. Contacting menu providers early will help them with planning to match supply with demand.

Once an SRF plan is approved, service providers must then engage menu providers and book into programs and/or supports. If a service is unable to access their preferred menu item, ECIBs will work with the service to consider alternative menu items that are available and align with the service’s SRF annual plan priorities and goals.

### Is there funding available to assist with planning and implementation SRF?

Yes. In recognition of the importance of dedicating time to plan and implement SRF, all service providers will be able to allocate part of their SRF to support administrative activities from 2022.

If the service is an Early Years Managed service, the existing arrangements will continue in 2022.

For all other services that receive over $5,000 in SRF, they can now allocate up to five per cent (to a maximum of $10,000) under their flexible funding allowance to support the planning and implementation of SRF.

The example below illustrates this policy:

*‘A service receiving $10,000 can allocate up to $2,500 to flexible funding items. If the service chooses to access the full 5 per cent or $500 for administration support, this is deducted from the flexible funding cap of $2,500, which in this case leaves $2,000 to spend on flexible funding items.’*

To record this in a service’s SRF plan, administrative activities will be:

* located within the Flexible Funding tab
* recorded under an item named ‘Admin/Planning’ (free text) which can be categorised by any of the drop-down priority areas
* for 2022, required to be manually calculated to not exceed five per cent of their total SRF allocation and limited to no more than $10,000
* approved by the local ECIB when approving the plan.

For services that receive under $5,000 in SRF, they will be provided an annual top up of $250 for this purpose and will not be required to note this in their plan or end of year acquittal in 2022.

### What is the ‘Backfill’ menu item, and how should it be used?

The 'Backfill' item should be used to record when services replace existing teachers/educators, during their regular program delivery/contact hours, with alternative staff on a temporary basis to enable teachers or educators to engage with SRF supports. This may include existing teachers/educators engaging in professional development, allied health sessions, coaching, reflective practice activities or consultation with parents/caregivers or other professionals such as allied health workers and family support workers.

Services will be required to record whether this item will come from existing staff or agency staff/new recruitment. Some service types may have access to relief pools. If those relief pools are considered to be employed by the same service/employer (i.e. as a casual staff member) then it can be recorded as ‘existing staff’, but if there is no employment link then please record this as ‘new recruitment’.

If the ‘Backfill’ item is being used to support activity that is a flexible funding activity, the cost/value of the ‘Backfill’ must be included in ‘flexible funding’ costs which cannot exceed 25 per cent of a service’s total SRF allocation.

Please note that ‘Backfill’ costs vary and are likely to differ across services. Each service provider is responsible for managing backfill arrangements.

### What is the ‘Additional Hours’ menu item, and how should it be used?

The ‘Additional Hours’ item should be used when existing staff work extra hours outside of their regular contracted hours, to engage with and implement programs and supports under SRF. This may include, for example, to participate in professional development or coaching, overtime to conduct family support meetings or attend consultation sessions with allied health providers outside regular working hours.

‘Additional Hours’ may also include the use of existing staff to expand kindergarten program hours or to decrease teacher/educator to child ratios to address the impacts of educational disadvantage.

Services must ensure that planned use of Additional Hours is captured accurately in the SRF plan. If the ‘Additional Hours’ item is being used to support activity that is a flexible funding activity, the cost/value of the additional hours must be included in ‘flexible funding’ costs which cannot exceed 25 per cent of a service’s total SRF allocation.

Note: If a service plans to engage new staff to resource additional hours to extend the length of the kindergarten program or reduce educator-to-child ratios this should be recorded under the ‘Additional Educators’ item.

Note: Some service types may have access to an internal relief staff pool for individuals who may not work at a service often. If that pool is employed (i.e., in a casual manner) by that same service/employer, then this will be recorded as ‘Additional Hours’, not the ‘Additional Educator’ item. This arrangement should be explained in the free text component in KIMS.

Please note that ‘Additional Hours’ costs vary and are likely to differ across services. Each service provider is responsible for managing additional hours arrangements.

### What is the Additional Educator menu item, and how can it be used?

Under SRF the employment of additional high-quality educators can improve educational practice and the ratio of educators to children where it is designed to improve the outcomes of children experiencing educational disadvantage by receiving a higher ‘dose’ of individualised educational interactions with teachers/educators or more program hours.

The ‘Additional Educators’ item should be used by services when they employ new additional teachers or educators on a regular and long-term basis.

It is expected that ‘Additional Educators’ would most commonly be engaged by services with significant levels of educational disadvantage and larger cohorts of children with vulnerability characteristics (for example ‘Out of Home Care’).

Where additional teachers and educators are being used to reduce child-to-staff ratios, their presence in the program must increase the developmental and educational interactions with children through integrated teaching and learning approaches to enhance their learning and developmental outcomes.

‘Additional Educators’ can also be used in a scenario where a service wishes to employ a new staff member on a regular basis over a long-term period with the specific purpose of providing coverage for program staff to engage with SRF activities.

‘Additional Educators’ should not be used solely to:

* support routine activities at the service, such as toileting or meal preparation.
* conduct manual tasks such as cleaning or packing up
* support or conduct administrative tasks for the service.

Note: If a service plans to use existing staff to resource additional hours to extend the length of the kindergarten program or reduce educator-to-child ratios this should be recorded under the ‘Additional Hours’ item.

From 2022, services that choose this menu item will be required to provide greater detail to the Department (through KIMS) as to how additional educators will be used to address educational disadvantage and/or support vulnerable children at the service.

Additionally, services must provide information about the qualification of additional educators. Additional educators can be degree-trained early childhood teachers or diploma or certificate-III trained educators.

If a service is running a Three-Year-Old kindergarten program and wishes to access Additional Educators through SRF, confirmation is required that the service is still able to staff and deliver the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program before using this item.

Services should discuss the proposed use of an Additional Educator with the local ECIB to ensure it meets the policy and intent of SRF.

### Can a service recruit someone for longer than a year to deliver SRF menu items?

From 2022, multi-year employment contracts for select menu items that require a service to employ a professional to deliver can be approved under SRF.

The Department recognises the need to provide stronger employment certainty to individuals delivering these items so that services can attract and retain quality staff, as well as better embed the menu item’s learnings into their improvement journey.

Under an approved arrangement, the Department will conditionally approve services to offer multi‑year employment contracts by pre-approving the use of future year’s SRF allocations for certain items.

This is only available to services which do not allocate more than 75 per cent of their total current year SRF cash allocation on the specific employment contract (this maximum applies to the total across participating services if pooled), to ensure there is a strong certainty that future employment commitments can be met, given some year-on-year fluctuations of SRF allocations.

The following SRF menu items which are eligible include:

* [Access to Early Learning (AEL) - School Readiness Funding Model](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=31)
* [Outreach Family Support](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=76)
* [Social worker or family support worker](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=61)
* [Breakfast clubs](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=73)
* [Transport programs](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/program.aspx?queryid=139)

Please note that multi-year employment contracts can be conditionally approved for a duration of up to and including three years but will not be authorised for the employment of teacher/educators (both additional as well as backfill) as part of SRF. Further, these do not represent a Departmental guarantee of funding for the totality of these employment contracts. They instead represent pre-approval of future years SRF allocations to be used for this purpose.

Services should speak to the local ECIB to ascertain whether a multi-year employment contract might suit the needs of the service and whether the service meets the eligibility criteria. Services must also record use of this function in KIMS.

### Are there additional supports for Learning from Home when/if a service is impacted by COVID19 restrictions?

In 2020 and again in 2021, the Department offered a temporary menu item, ‘[Learning from Home](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/SRFmenu.aspx)’, for when services were closed except to children whose parents/carers are Authorised Workers and for vulnerable children due to COVID-19 restrictions and bushfires in 2019.

Under this item services could use up to $5,000 or up to 25 per cent (whichever is higher) of the total service-level 2021 SRF allocation to support children and families to learn from home during this period. This may require services to reallocate funds from other menu items to the ‘Learning from Home’ menu item.

Under the ‘Learning from Home’ menu item services could implement a range of supports including:

* guidance for families to continue their child’s learning from home
* assisting families to set-up and follow a daily routine
* providing access to online learning supports
* providing access to physical learning resources
* supports designed for a group of children, a sub-group of children or an individual child and their family.

In 2020 and 2021 services accessing the ‘Learning from Home’ menu item were not required to immediately update the SRF plan(s) for each service, however there was a requirement of record keeping and accounting for this expenditure in the End-of-Year-Acquittal (EOYA). This included when multiple services pool funding to access the ’Learning from Home’ menu item to offer supports across services.

It is unclear how COVID-19 might again impact the sector in 2022. Services will be advised, in line with health guidelines at the time, if this item will be available in 2022.

For the 2022 planning process it is expected that services develop an SRF plan that is reflective of the needs of the service when delivering a program onsite. There is not an expectation that a service should factor in Learning from Home at this point. However, it is recommended that services consider a contingency plan, if the need arises, for how to approach alterations to the annual plan to facilitate Learning from Home in 2022. This may include considering which menu items might be replaced with Learning from Home supports if required.

Please contact the local ECIB for further support and advice about Learning from Home.

### Can I use any of my SRF allocation on non-menu items/flexibly?

Services that receive more than $5,000 of SRF may choose to use up to 25 per cent of their total funding allocation (after the deduction of their administrative allowance) flexibly on a local priority in consultation with local ECIBs. Local priorities are needs that are identified as unique to a particular service or community and/or allow access to items or supports that are not on the Menu.

The use of this flexible funding must meet the intent of SRF, which is to support the outcomes of educationally disadvantaged children and build the capability of educators and families to respond to the needs of the cohort of children at the service. When entering a flexible funding item in KIMS, services will need to select the SRF priority area that most closely aligns to the item.

Flexible funding should not be used for IT solutions or for infrastructure, however if services are unsure, they should discuss any proposals with the local ECIB.

Any use of flexible funding must first be discussed with the local ECIB to ensure it meets the eligibility criteria, and then is to be recorded on SRF plans and be acquitted by services. See the SRF quick reference guide on the [Department’s KIM webpage](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderim.aspx) for instructions on entering an item as a local priority, or as a planning and implementation item into a SRF plan, in KIMS under flexible funding.

Furthermore, any Backfill allocated against flexible funding items must also be drawn from the 25 per cent flexible funding cap. Backfill attributed to flexible funding items must be entered within the flexible funding area of the SRF plan.

Please refer to the SRF: Annual Planning Guide on the [School Readiness Funding webpage](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/srf.aspx) for information regarding the ‘planning and implementation’ item under flexible funding.

### What is the process if the SRF allocation is not spent in the allocated year?

SRF is intended to support the cohort of children in the year it is allocated and should be spent in the year that it is received as stipulated in the SRF terms and conditions.

Services are expected to make every effort to spend their SRF allocation in the year it is provided, however the Department acknowledges that there may be extenuating circumstances where this is not possible. Where a service experiences an underspend, this must be identified in the end-of-year-acquittal and the following policies will apply:

* services with an underspend of $1000 or less will not have their subsequent year’s SRF payment adjusted to reflect the underspend – services will retain any underspend of $1000 or less and will be expected to spend this in the following year.
* services with an underspend of $1001 or more will have their subsequent year’s SRF payments adjusted to reflect the underspend.

Any adjustment to SRF payments will be based on the amount of unspent SRF that is noted in a service’s approved end of year acquittal of the relevant year.

If this scenario applies, services will be notified by the Department of the impact on and any change to the SRF allocation for the following year. Unless advised otherwise, services’ SRF allocation (and if applicable, allied health session entitlements) will remain as advised in the original terms and conditions letter which will have been received in the lead up to the annual planning process. To enable both services and the Department to monitor SRF spend through the planning cycle, the mid-year acquittal process provides an opportunity for services to analyse and report against progress as per funding amounts.

In the scenario where a service’s underspend is greater than the subsequent year’s SRF allocation, the local ECIB will work with the service to determine next steps.

### What if I have pre-purchased a menu item which has not been delivered?

If service providers have pre-purchased an item that has not been delivered in 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19, services will need to discuss with the menu provider and negotiate either:

* delivery of the item in 2022; or
* a refund from the menu provider.

If a refund is agreed upon, service providers are encouraged to spend any refunded SRF in 2021 in an alternate way.

The total value of any pre-purchased and undelivered items in 2021 will be recouped from 2022 SRF payments, regardless of whether a refund or delayed delivery in 2022 has been negotiated. This is in line with the overarching policy for any unspent SRF in a calendar year.

Services will need to include details of pre-purchased and undelivered items in their end-of-year acquittal.

If a service intends to complete a pre-purchased and undelivered item from 2021 in 2022, this must be included on their 2022 SRFAnnual Plan. This can be identified in the details / comments section of the item with the phrase “Item pre-purchased in 2021”.

Service providers can also contact the local ECIB with any questions or concerns about pre-purchased and undelivered items.

### Can services pool their funding with other services to maximise the use of their SRF allocation?

Yes. All or part of a service’s SRF allocation may be pooled with other service(s) and/or schools where it is beneficial to promote access to an item or items under a priority that is shared across services. Pooling refers to a service partnering with other services and/or schools to purchase and access programs or supports of shared interest.

For example, it may be more cost effective/cheaper to deliver professional learning to a group of educators across two services, or even across service/s and local school/s.

Pooling may help services to:

* access programs and supports that are beyond the reach of a single provider’s allocation
* support a larger community-focused initiative that needs sustained support to result in long term practice change
* strengthen links to local providers and education settings (including primary schools) to enable a more collaborative approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children and families in the local community.

Service providers will be required to ensure each service receives their allocated funding amount of any item purchased through pooled arrangements (i.e. that individual services with higher funding allocations receive a representative amount of support from any items purchased through pooling).

Furthermore, service providers that arrange programs and supports through a pooled funding arrangement have a responsibility to ensure that any service engaging with the supports will benefit and that the support aligns with the unique goals and needs of their participating services.

ECIB staff may be able to support service providers by facilitating opportunities for collaboration and identifying opportunities for pooling funding.

### Are there limits to what a service can use their SRF on / are there any prohibited items?

Yes.

The intent of SRF is to enhance the capability of educators and families to support children’s learning and development. SRF should be used to purchase programs and supports that directly meet this intent.

As the following items do not meet this intent, SRF cannot be used to purchase:

* travel from kindergartens to other centres
* accommodation for educators
* information technology equipment such as laptops or tablets
* environmental equipment such as play equipment or therapeutic devices.

Please note that resources (such as books, CDs/DVDs, lunch boxes, clothing) may only be purchased in circumstances where they are required to effectively implement a particular menu item and the purchase of these resources is above what would usually be covered by primary base funding or other funding sources. For example, many Hanen programs require the purchase of a supporting guidebook for educators and/or parents and carers. The cost of this resource can be acquitted with the cost of accessing the program as it is a requirement for effective implementation of the Hanen program. SRF plans need to clearly outline which menu item relates to these resources.

The local ECIB can support service providers during the planning process if they are unsure what programs and supports are suitable to purchase.

### Can services amend their SRF plan after it has been submitted and approved?

Service providers should only adjust their SRF plans if planned menu items are not available, are unable to be accessed or if there is another valid reason for adjusting the existing SRF plan (for example to respond to new circumstances, enrolments or information).

Any updates or changes to a services SRF plan must be discussed with the local ECIB staff prior to making variations to plans in KIMs.

Any change to an SRF plan in KIMS greater than $1,000, or any value for flexible funding items requires ECIB approval. From 2022, the local ECIB will automatically be notified when this occurs.

Services will also be required to provide reasoning for any variation made to the annual plan in the mid-year review and end of year acquittal.

## c. Allied Health

### Do services receive Allied Health supports as part of the funding allocation?

To ensure kindergarten services have access to high quality allied health services, the Department has set up a pre-purchased multi-disciplinary allied health arrangement.

Under this arrangement, eligible services receiving $5,000 or more in SRF, will receive a proportion of their SRF funding allocation as allied health sessions which are delivered by an allied health provider at the service.

The Department will advise service providers on the number of allied health sessions their services will receive as part of the overall SRF allocation. This allocation will also be noted in the service provider’s terms and conditions for each service.

The Allied Health Support Line is also available to all services, regardless of their SRF allocation. Further information about this service, including contact details, can be found on the [SRF website.](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/srf.aspx)

### Can services receiving less than $5,000 also access allied health supports?

Services receiving less than $5,000 can access allied health supports through the SRF Allied Health Support Line. The Allied Health Support Line is available to all services, regardless of their SRF allocation. Further information about this service, including contact details, can be found on the [SRF website.](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/srf.aspx)

Services receiving less than $5,000 can also source allied health support independently from the allied health menu items. Service providers may also like to consider opportunities to pool funding with other service providers in the local area to access these supports. For more information about pooling arrangements or networks in the area please contact the local ECIB.

### How do I arrange Allied Health sessions and what should I expect?

The Department-contracted allied health provider will contact services to arrange delivery of allied health sessions. Services are encouraged to be responsive to contact from allied health providers, to ensure optimal planning for, and access to, the available of allied health sessions.

The multi-disciplinary SRF allied health team generally comprise of a speech pathologist, occupational therapist, and/or child psychologist.

The first session with the allied health professional is used to review the SRF Plan and collaboratively plan for the use of allied health support across the year. Support from allied health professionals is provided under a capability-building model and is provided at a service level. This may include (but is not limited to), coaching, modelling, training, and working with teachers and educators and families. Remote/online supports and resources for services and families may also be provided.

Individual interventions, including assessments and therapeutic work with individual children and families, cannot be provided by allied health professionals under SRF.

# Frequently Asked Questions – Receiving SRF

## Funding Allocations

### How are the funding amounts for each kindergarten calculated?

Funding is allocated to services based on the level of educational need/vulnerability of children (and their families) who are enrolled at their service. This is determined by student family occupation education (SFOE) data and other enrolment information which must be collected by service providers as part of a child’s enrolment, and reporting to the Department through the Annual Confirmation process around April each year.

### What is the per child rate for SRF?

SRF is service-level funding, not funding for individual children. As such, there is no funding per child rate. The funding allocation for each service will vary depending on the cohort and number of children attending the service that year.

### How often is SRF calculated?

The Department calculates the primary funding round SRF amounts based on confirmed enrolment and SFOE data submitted by services via KIMS at Annual Confirmation each year. Service providers are then notified of their funding allocations for the following year, in September or October each year. This approach ensures that service providers have time to plan for, receive and spend SRF in the year that it is received.

To be eligible for SRF, services must be confirmed and funded in KIMS with SFOE data collected for at least 70 per cent of enrolments.

There are two subsequent SRF funding rounds in December and April to capture:

* any remaining services which were not initially eligible to receive SRF during the primary allocation round, or
* new services that receive funding to deliver a kindergarten program after the Annual Confirmation date.

SRF allocations calculated during the final funding round in April are pro-rated at 75 per cent.

Allied Health allocations are only distributed in the primary funding round. December and April sweep allocations received by services will be as cash only. Service providers funded in the December or April sweeps may choose to access allied health through the relevant menu items.

### Will service providers or services receive the funding?

As is the case with other kindergarten funding, SRF is paid to the service provider, not the service. Service level funding is reflected in the service provider portal in KIMS. If the service provider manages multiple services, the service provider is responsible for ensuring each service receives the allocated funding amount, and that it is also acquitted at a service level.

### When will service providers receive SRF?

Service providers receive SRF in two 50 per cent instalment payments; the first in February-March and the second between June-August.

A service is eligible to receive a payment once all the following requirements are met:

* terms and conditions letters accepted electronically by service providers in KIMS
* SRF service plan approved by the Department
* acquittal of the previous year’s funding received and approved by the Department (if relevant).

### What if a service’s enrolment numbers increase significantly? Are they entitled to more SRF for that year?

If a service experiences a significant fluctuation in enrolments of educationally disadvantaged children, the service provider can apply to be considered for additional SRF funding. There are certain conditions that must be met for consideration of additional funding. Please contact the local ECIB to discuss eligibility.

### Will services that have only just become funded still receive SRF this year?

Services that become funded after Annual Confirmation (April of each year) will not receive SRF until the following year. This approach will ensure that service providers have time to plan for, receive and spend SRF in the year that it is received.

### Why do some service providers’ SRF payment amounts appear differently in their bank account to the amount listed on their funding allocation letter?

The difference is due to payment of GST for service providers registered for GST. Funding allocation letters list SRF funding excluding GST. Service providers registered for GST receive payments with 10 per cent GST in addition to their SRF amount. The GST payment is calculated and paid automatically during payment processing and is required to be remitted to the Australian Tax Office (ATO) by the service provider as per usual ATO requirements.

### What if a service provider does not share information about funding allocations and planning with their services?

Service providers will be notified directly of the funding allocations for all their services each year. The Department does not share this information directly with services. As SRF is a service level funding source, the Department expects service providers to work with services to develop plans that spend their allocated SRF in a way that best meets the needs of the children at each service.

### What should the service provider do if not notified of SRF amount for a particular service?

Services will only receive a SRF allocation if they have a funding status of ‘Funded’ and a confirmation status of ‘Confirmed’ in KIMS. If a service provider has not received notification of their service’s funding allocation, please check the funding status and confirm status of the service in KIMS.

If the service’s funding status is ‘Funded’ and the confirm status is ‘Confirmed’ and the service provider has not received notification of an SRF allocation, please contact the local ECIB in the first instance.

### Why have this year’s funding amounts changed from the previous years?

Variations in funding allocations from previous years are generally the result of changes in confirmed enrolment data from year to year. This includes changes in:

* enrolment numbers
* the characteristics of children and families enrolled in the service.

If a service experiences considerable variation in funding from a previous year, it may be due to:

* low SFOE data collection in the previous year
* improvements to SFOE and enrolment data collection over time allowing funding amounts to reflect the cohort of children attending the kindergarten more accurately.
* significant changes in enrolment numbers and concentrated disadvantage in kindergarten services.

### How can services plan effectively when there are year-to-year variations in SRF?

Funding allocations are provided several months prior to the commencement of the kindergarten year, meaning services have time to consider how they can plan with their SRF allocated amount. It is expected that services have already begun their SRF planning prior to funding allocations being announced, including gathering and analysing data to build up the evidence base for the following year’s plan. There are offline planning documents which services can use to begin this process.

It is expected that SRF plans build on existing skills and knowledge from year-to-year, despite variation in funding amounts. The Menu contains a range of items that address the priority areas and range from no/low to high cost, so that services can adapt their plans while still addressing the original goals.

### Do services need to expend all the SRF allocation in the year it is allocated?

Yes, SRF is required to be expended in the year it is allocated, as per the terms and conditions letter.

### Can the Department provide indicative SRF amounts to service providers?

No.

Indicative allocations cannot be provided. While it is appreciated that services would like to forward plan for the use of SRF, given the variability in enrolments and child characteristics over time it is not possible for the Department to accurately estimate funding to service providers.

### What happens if a service ceases after their provider has been notified of their funding amount?

It is a requirement that service providers advise the Department when a service ceases to operate (temporarily or permanently), and that this is correctly recorded in KIMS.

As with all types of kindergarten funding, SRF will only be allocated to services that are delivering a funded kindergarten program at the time of payment. KIMS will be used to determine if a service’s status has changed before SRF allocations are paid to service providers each year.

Where a service permanently ceases to be funded, the Department:

* will ask the service provider to acquit the funding spent to date
* will recoup unspent funds.

### What if a service becomes unfunded for a portion of a kindergarten year?

When a service becomes unfunded, such as when a teacher leaves a service without a suitable replacement, allied health support delivered through the allied health model will be suspended until the service recommences delivering a funded program.

If the program is unlikely to recommence within the kindergarten year, the Department will ask the service provider to acquit the funding spent to date and recoup unspent funding.

Services are expected to seek refunds for purchased and not yet delivered Menu items in the first instance. If the Menu provider confirms this is not possible, programs can be delivered as originally intended, however written proof of the service attempting to seek a refund is required for End of Year acquittal.

If a service requires additional assistance but has recently become unfunded, other short-term supports may be available. Service providers should contact the local ECIB to discuss how to manage SRF in the instance of a service temporarily becoming unfunded.

### What happens to SRF allocations if kindergarten services change providers?

SRF is allocated and spent at a service level.

If a service transfers to a new provider before their first SRF allocation payment is made, SRF allocations will be paid to the new service provider.

If a service transfers after first or second SRF allocation payment is made, it is expected that the service providers would agree the SRF funding amount to transfer reflecting what has been spent to date, and that funding would be transferred by the previous provider directly to the new provider.

If a service provider is in this scenario and experiencing any issues, it is recommended to contact the local ECIB.

### Will SRF acknowledge regional differences in access across Victoria?

Yes.

SRF recognises that rural services face a range of unique challenges, including availability of specialist services. Ensuring supply in regional areas is a key factor for the Department centrally contracting allied health support. A state-wide price was built into the allied health model so no extra costs apply to kindergartens in regional or rural areas.

The Department is aware of supply and access issues related to menu items and is working with menu providers to scale up their operations to provide services across the State. It is an expectation of becoming an approved menu providers that they are able to deliver in regional and rural areas, noting item costs can account for travel costs. Many menu providers have adapted to online delivery of programs and supports in response to COVID-19 restrictions, which has increased their ability to provide their services across Victoria. Where there are persistent supply issues with menu providers, service providers should advise the local ECIBs.

# Frequently Asked Questions – Acquitting SRF

## Mid-year review (MYR)

### What is the MYR process, when does it happen and why?

Services are required to complete a MYR survey between April and June of each planning cycle. This process provides an opportunity for services to reflect on how they are tracking in implementing their SRF plan, to make any changes required due to unexpected circumstances and to assess and communicate the likelihood they will experience an underspend. This enables the Department to provide support where required, address barriers to implementing SRF plans for services and address any risks of significant underspend.

Leading up to the MYR period, services will be notified about the process and expectations for completion via the Kindergarten Funding Inbox.

## End of Year Acquittal (EOYA)

### When is the End of Year Acquittal (EOYA) due?

An End of Year acquittal online form for each service must be completed and certified by the service provider and submitted via KIMS to the local ECIB by the end of the third week in December each year.

### Who needs to complete the EOYA?

Service providers are best placed to know who will be able to contribute to completing each section of the acquittal. For example, if the service has a business manager, this may be the best person to assist with financial questions, while educators in the service will be best placed to contribute answers to the questions about outcomes.

### What is involved in the EOYA?

Like previous years, the EOYA will collect:

* information about planned and actual delivery of intended menu items, allied health and flexible funding
* financial information related to purchased menu items, Department pre-purchased allied health sessions and flexible funding.
* outcomes and reflection including evaluative questions relating to progress made against intended goals and,
* a formal certification by the authorised delegate to confirm and finalise the acquittal before submitting to the Department.

To support completion of the EOYA detailed instructions and guidance will be provided closer to this time.

In 2021, the EOYA will be available for the first time in KIMS. The EOYA will be available from early December for service providers to complete.

### What evidence do service providers need to collect as records in preparation for EOYA?

Providers are not required to submit invoices and receipts with their SRF EOYA.

However, service providers are expected to maintain accurate and complete financial records as outlined in the Kindergarten Funding Guide available [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx) . This should include records of their spending against their SRF Annual Plan, which may be audited.

### What if our service only received a small amount of funding?

All service providers are required to acquit how they expended SRF. If a service received a small amount of funding (for example $1,000) it is not anticipated that the acquittal will take long, as only sections relevant to SRF menu items will need to be completed.

### How should GST be reported in the EOYA?

As per the terms and conditions, SRF allocations are provided exclusive of GST. Service providers registered for GST receive payments with 10 per cent GST in addition to their SRF amount.

How GST is reported in the online acquittal form depends on whether the service is registered for GST or not:

* If the service is registered for GST, exclude GST from the cost of all items entered
* If the service is not registered for GST, include GST (i.e. the gross cost of item) in the item costs.

Service providers should consult with an accountant if requiring further information.

### What happens if a service does not complete the end of year acquittal?

Future SRF funding allocations will not be paid until the EOYA has been finalised, submitted and approved by the Department.

# Frequently Asked Questions – Working with the Early Childhood Improvement Branch

### How can ECIBs support services and service providers with their SRF?

The types of support that ECIBs may be asked to provide their service providers include:

* working with service providers to collect high quality SFOE data annually and, where possible, support services to embed data collection into enrolment processes
* providing pre-planning support such as assistance in identifying children’s needs, interpreting data, linking the VEYLDF with the National Quality Framework, and exploring the role they play in planning
* supporting reflective practice discussions (practice and pedagogy) to lift the quality of the service - in the context of preparing for, implementing and evaluating use of SRF
* assisting with identifying areas and levels of need emerging from data sources
* support choosing menu items to address areas of need
* supporting educators in implementing SRF
* working with services to develop goals and monitoring systems that measure the impact of SRF in their service
* providing a central point for questions and feedback
* facilitating opportunities for collaboration, such as communities of practice and identifying opportunities for pooling funding
* assisting in communicating SRF guidelines and planning processes to others involved in the service (for example, Committees of Management, Parental Advisory Groups, and service staff).

### How often should service providers be engaging their ECIB in relation to SRF?

Service providers are expected to work in collaboration with ECIBs to develop and implement their SRF Annual Plan. It is recommended that all services attend planning workshops (where possible/available) to support the gathering and use of data and preparing SRF plans. Services should also draw on online resources and materials to complete their SRF Annual Plan.

The support and engagement with ECIBs will be different, depending on the amount of SRF they receive. For example, services receiving up to $5,000 of SRF may have lighter touch engagement with their ECIB.

Irrespective of their level of funding, all services receiving SRF are required to submit their SRF Annual Plan for review and approval by their ECIB. All services can expect to work with their Kindergarten Improvement Advisor (KIA) to discuss their identified priority areas and levels of children’s needs, selection of menu items to address these needs, goals and measurements of success, and approach to implementing SRF.

At the highest end, services receiving more than $50,000 of SRF should expect to work in close collaboration with their KIA and ECIB Manager to develop their SRF Annual Plan and engage in reflective practice on how they will use their SRF allocation and throughout the implementation of their plan. As a general rule, the higher the allocation, the greater involvement ECIBs will have with those services to support teachers and educators implementing SRF.

### How do I contact the local Early Childhood Improvement Branch?

There are 17 ECIBs closely aligned to local government areas. Refer to this [map of the Department’s Areas and Regions](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/structure/Pages/regions.aspx) to determine which ECIB is in the local area.

Contact details for each of the Branches can be found below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Department Region | Department Area and contact details |
| **North Eastern Victoria** | **Goulburn**  P: 1300 333 231 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.goulburn@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.goulburn@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Inner East**  P: 1300 333 231 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.ie@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.ie@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Outer East**  P: 1300 333 231 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.oe@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.oe@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Ovens Murray**  P: 1300 333 231 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.om@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.om@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **South Eastern Victoria** | **Bayside Peninsula**  P: 1300 338 738 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.bp@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.bp@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Southern Melbourne**  P: 1300 338 738 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.sm@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.sm@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Inner Gippsland**  P: 1300 338 738 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.ig@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.ig@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Outer Gippsland**  P: 1300 338 738 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.og@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.og@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **North Western Victoria** | **Hume Moreland**  P: 1300 338 691 E: [ec.improvement.huma@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:ec.improvement.huma@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Loddon Campaspe**  P: 1300 338 691  E: [earlychildhood.improvement.lc@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.lc@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **North Eastern Melbourne**  P: 1300 338 691 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.nem@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.nem@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Mallee**  P: 1300 338 691 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.mallee@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.mallee@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **South Western Victoria** | **Brimbank Melton**  P: 03 4334 0593  E: [earlychildhood.improvement.bm@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.bm@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Wimmera South West**  P: 03 5215 5103  E: [earlychildhood.improvement.wsw@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.wsw@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Central Highlands**  P: 03 4334 0575 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.ch@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.ch@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Barwon**  P: 1300 333 232 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.barwon@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.barwon@education.vic.gov.au) |
| **Western Melbourne**  P: 03 7005 1821 E: [earlychildhood.improvement.wm@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:earlychildhood.improvement.wm@education.vic.gov.au) |

# Document Version Control

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Version | Date | Modifications / Comments |
| 1 | October 2021 | Original document |
| 1.1 | November 2021 | Clarification on:   * flexible funding policy (p.14) * underspend policy of $1000 or less (p.15) * end of year acquittal submission timeframes (p.22) * backfill (p.11) and additional hours (p.12) determining internal vs external staff |